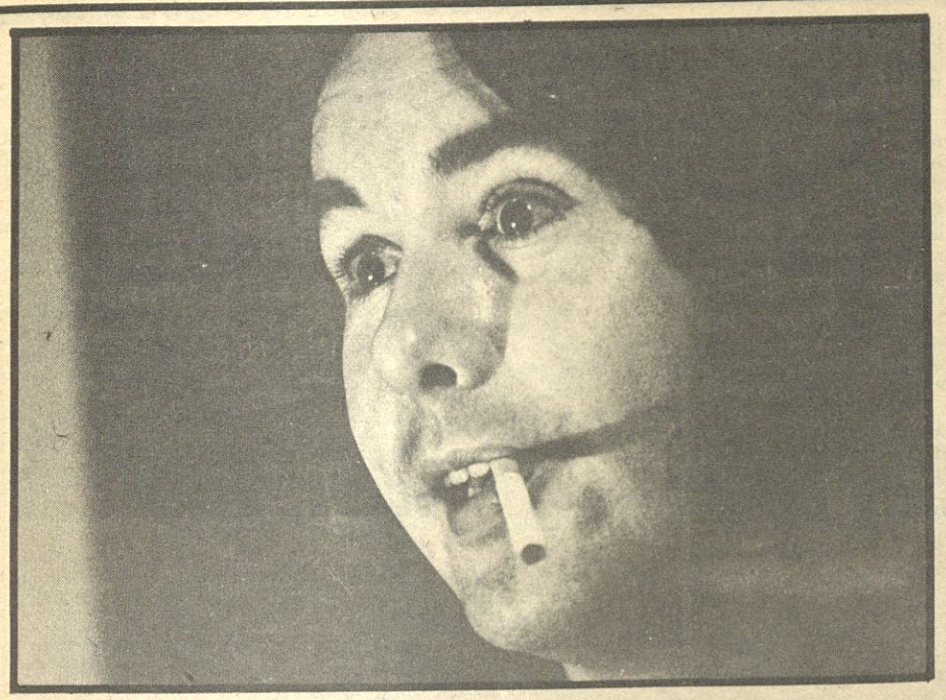

BRIAN DOWNEY looking wide awake and ebullient.

Liz schiz about The Biz

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHIL LYNOTT AND PHIL LYNOTT AND THE REST OF THIN LIZZY AND THIN LIZZY.

When you're so big in America that you qualify for your own hotel room, the anxiety starts creeping in. Like, Image becomes important — and a flattering mug-shot is vital. ***CHRIS SALEWICZ*** provides this study of the stress situation . . .

PHIL LYNOTT looking tired and emotional.

IT'S JUST after seven in the evening. Phil Lynott and Scott Gorham are stretched on the floor of room 1012 in the Continental Hyatt on Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, demolishing a bottle of J&B whiskey. KMET is pumping out what is by now the inevitable sound of Peter Frampton.

LA-born Gorham picks at his badly peeling Arizona sun-ravaged chest and slumps there, bombed and listless. Lynott is, as ever, speeding along on the constant edge of anxiety that hides behind the self-defined Johnny Cool persona he lays down for the punters.

"This time, man," the Dublin-Manchester accent mutters to no-one in particular, "this time, man, we've got to be very careful with the type of programmes and pictures and biographies that go out about us . . . so that people really understand what we're all about.

"I mean, the kids are great, man . . . Oh, *foook!!!*" he gasps as if ending some Grand Cosmic Orgasm as The Face of '76 segues into Lofgren's 'Back It Up", " 'E's brilliant. Maybe I can get a cassette of this album. I love it! 'E reminds me of Dylan. 'E does fantastic versions of 'is stuff' 'imself but you know somebody else great could do just as good a version like the way 'Endrix could do a great version of a Dylan song. 'I Don't Wanna Know' — maybe I could do that sometime.

"For fook's sake!!! Oh no-o-o-o!!" he leaps up, nearly spilling spilling his glass over the carpet as the tonsils of the street punk from Washington DC segue into Lynott's own vocals on "The Boys Are Back In Town".

For the first time since we met three hours or so back, the neuroses start to edge off and the wired intensity slides into a smile : *"Fooking hell, man!!!* That really does me in, you know. It's 'appening everywhere we go."

The girl DJ with the *Oui* centrefold black molasses voice comes on the air: "Thin Lizzy: 'Boys Are Back In Town'. And those boys *are* back in town this coming Wednesday. I hope they have a party at Dino's too."

Phil walks over to the door, running a brush through his hair: "Oh well, I'd better go down to the Coffee Shop and get chattin' or something."

"Errhh, Phil. Your jacket collar's up at the back."

"Yeah. I do that on purpose, you know," he leers. "You get chicks coming up to straighten it for you. It's always worked very well for me."

Then, sardonically: "I am Johnny Cool, you know."

We don't bump into each other again until the next morning. Apparently the jacket collar had proved successful.

THIS IS the last time Thin Lizzy will have to double up in hotel bedrooms, figures Chris O'Donnell, Lizzy's co-manager.

Thin Lizzy, see, are being given The Big One by Mercury Records. The company is Getting Behind The Band. Head promo honcho Mike Bone is in LA from Chicago. His hotel room pallor and thinning hair are just the visuals of what it's taken to put their album, "Jailbreak", at number 29 this week.

Bone can spew out "product info" on Lizzy's "Regional Break-out Points" at an adrenalin-rushing rate. And he's had some jolly good wheezes too.

Here, let guitarist Brian Robertson tell you all about one of Mike's good wheezes:

"When we hit Portland, Oregon, right, they had this promotional thing for the album, right? For 'Jailbreak'. They were gonna run this competition in the local prison, to see which of the inmates who could write the best essay. The prize was to get out to see Thin Lizzy.

"But what happened was, two guys won it, right? And two weeks before the gig they bust out of the jail.

"So they had to pick two new winners, and the two they picked . . . Well, one of them was a woman-basher and the other was in for first-degree forgery. It's really weird, man, the way they do things over here."

Pretty crass stuff, huh?

Still, 29 with the proverbial; and the thoroughly classic single "The Boys Are Back In Town" is Top Twenty on both sides of the Atlantic.

PHIL LYNOTT's sitting by the pool on the roof of the Hyatt House. Next to us a gentleman down from Woodstock to get over his divorce twists into a most impressive lotus position and audibly expectorates LA smog from his lungs. The sun is very hot.

Perhaps the strain of being hailed everywhere as the first British band to happen in the States in 1976 is getting to the band's bassist and principal songwriter.

He flicks nervously at his Captain Blood earring and looks very tired: "I mean, okay, the band's breaking. It's *not* important that we break as *fast* as we're breaking. It's

■ *Continues over page*

THIN LIZZY

■ *From previous page*

never been that important to me. It's the quality of the breaking. If we break with quality we'll last like all them bands that are me heroes.

"Like The Who. That band's great. It's got integrity and that's why it works. Pete Townshend never lost contact with his audience and 'e didn't go through too many mind fook-ups."

I sense that you also believe almost passionately in total contact with the punters who buy your records, right? And you seem to believe in *songs*, as opposed to just getting up there and creating series of sounds? Have you always believed in The Song?

"Yeah," he nods. "Well, I was a singer, right, and the 60s proved to me that melodies played in the rock idiom . . . That whole weird thing rock went through when the arrangements dominated — ELP, Jethro Tull and 10/4 time — was very harmful to rock because although there are a lot of good musicians, musicianship and melody don't always have to be the same thing. And there's a lot of false focus.

"The very harmful stage of the whole thing was when bands just got up and turned their backs on audiences and just let it float . . . Put screens and films on and hoped the audiences were tripping and that they'd gerroff on it."

My, this is almost like an introductory course in The Naked Lynott . . .

LYNOTT, YOU see, is pretty suss. Admittedly, the first time we met he opened the car door and urinated in conversational midflow — as it were — but that, of course, was an encounter with the constantly self-hyped and self-created Johnny Cool, ace puller and rock 'n' roll hanger-outer.

The second meeting was purely social. That time he laid a volume of his poetry on me. That's right, Phil Lynott, bassist and songwriter, has sold 10,000 copies of *Songs For While I'm Away*, a collection of verses mainly taken from already published songs.

"I'm incredibly proud of that," he says. "I'm more proud of that than, say, I was when the record got into the charts. A budding poet, ehh???"

Anyway, so like I lay this basic schizophrenia in The Man Behind the Music on Phil.

At first, his reply seems somewhat obscure: "That's why I love John Lennon, man. To me Lennon is great because 'e cuts right through . . . 'E says things on records that *I* disagree with, but I love 'im because 'e breaks the power of the stereo and of the media. You know, criticism really becomes dangerous when people start reading it as though it were the law. It's the same as people listening to the stereo and acting as though it's a god speaking to them, you know.

"And you get this whole idol thing, okay? Well, all right, I'll be that idol but I won't abuse that power, you know.

"Now there's a guy here in LA who's written how I'm Bruce Springsteen . . . Now I have to spend half me interviews saying 'I'm not fooking Bruce Springsteen' and that I appreciate him but I don't try to imitate him: I take it as a compliment when we're compared, but I take it as an insult when it's said I imitate him. I mean, it rolls off me tongue now, that answer. But this guy 'ere in LA worded it in such a way that all of a sudden I'm on the defensive."

Then Lynott splutters and grins: "For some of these question-and-answer interviews I've got the whole thing prepared: 'Ow do you pronounce your second name?' 'Lie-not. I tell no lies.' Titter, titter. 'What do you think to the tax problem?' 'It's a problem I'm looking forward to having.' Haw, haw, haw. You know? Tax problem! I'm still having to borrow ten dollars to buy a t-shirt.

"But anyway, it's a freaky one, the power of the pen . . ."

And so is the power of being up onstage . . .

"Oh yeah," he nods, wheeling round to follow a passing bikini bottom. "That's the nice thing about being a live act. I can get the audience, but it's for the *moment*. It's like, 'Can I do it tonight? And you can see when people like you. But on record — and with the pen — it's almost for all-time. Really a lot more thought has to go into it.

Chris O'Donnell, Lizzy's co-manager, wanders into tape space with a bunch of photograph contact sheets the band had had taken at Disneyland.

Some of the photographs are all right. Phil chuckles and thrusts one under my nose: "I take a lot of bad shots, you know, because of all the faces I pull on stage."

And, of course, your ego doesn't allow you to have bad shots going out to the press?

"Nah. I only want shots where I look 'andsome. And some of these are very funky. I love shots where the band look *grassed!!!* Knowharramean??? And I think the girls do too."

Lizzy do seem to be doing very well with the young ladies now. Remember the bad old days, though, Phil? Remember being looked on as a token loser band?

"Yeah," he laughs.

You were actually conscious of that, then?

"I was conscious that the media saw that we didn't follow up Whisky In The Jar. And we didn't in terms of record sales.

"The only place we seemed to be happening was on the street. But, you know, that's Thin Lizzy summed up for you.

"Like an album and three singles after 'Whisky In The Jar', man, you'd get people mention in a 'Whisky In The Jar' in interviews — and I'd go *'Oh Jeeezuz'*. That was how far behind the press got on the band. They really lost contact.

"They were all going on about 'The Irish Traditional thing'. Bad photographs went out. We were generally misrepresented. You know, all the things that I'm worrying about now happened to us the wrong way. And that's where we got the loser tag.

"And then when we broke up . . . Well, not many bands break up three times," he laughs, "and still come out on top."

Which can't be just down to your ego? "It's also down to our drummer Brian Downey. Me and Brian have known one another since we were kids.

"But . . . I'm the mouthpiece of the band. I look upon meself as . . . You take a band that's made up of arms, legs, bodies . . . I happen to be the piece that talks. And does all that area of it, you know? I'm also very easy to recognise: the darkie in the middle jumping around with the guitar, you know. *Dat boy's got rhydm!!!* Knowharramean???"

The pool-side phone rings. Phil answers it: "Yeah, yeah. I got your number. No, 'e's down the hall. 'E's down the hall, baby. Santa Monica Civic. 'E's down there." He slams down the receiver and sits down again as an ad for Coppertone suntan oil appears in the sky. "That chick is crazy, man. She starts saying, 'Okay, what time do you want me upstairs? What time do you want me to go to the concert? . . . that chick that Charley was with the other night. The one that was barking. Rover, they call 'er."

Scott Gorham returns from a gruelling session with a gaggle of Nikon-waving Nip journalists. Scott is tired because he's been missing out on rest since returning to his home town. Phil is therby presented with an opportunity to expound on the virtues of the European woman:

"I still miss it, you know, Scott. I miss the old 'unt and kill. I really do. I like to feel, 'Okay, I'm getting here, but I got here by my own route'. You know. In Europe the women are far trickier. They make you feel you're pulling them. Here it's just very upfront. You wanna go to bed? Yeah, I didn't until now you smooth-talking bastard. You talked me into it."

"THAT BLEW me out! 'Ere's us trying to come on like underdogs," Phil Lynott sniggers after the Santa Monica Civic gig.

It maybe surprised some of the audience, too, hearing Lizzy introduced as "The next supergroup."

Despite the ovatory intro Lizzy weren't headlining but second on a three-act bill to Aynsley Dunbar's Journey. The audience and the show though, appeared to exist for Thin Lizzy alone. The gig was very good to excellent. Journey were blown right off the bill by Lizzy's 'popper' energy.

"We only do one slow number. It's for all the ladies here tonight. it's called 'Still In Love With You'."

The sound system was clear as a bell, and Lynott's voice came over as utterly distinctive: a blend, on a quieter number like this, of Van Morrison and Eric Burdon, if you like. The oft-mentioned Springsteen burst of sincerity is only there if you want it to be . . .

Brian Robertson, Scott Gorham and Lynott are all archetypal English guitar hero material: skinny as hell with natty lines in outlaw chic threads. Such matters always help. It also seems quite useful that Lynott can announce: "All the way from the US of A, the City of Angels, Los Angeles, on lead guitar, Scott Gorham."

There was a real 'prodigal son' reaction from the crowd.

This audience were so orgasmic for Thin Lizzy that they even leapt to their feet and rushed the stage after Brian Downey's drum solo. Was this a rock'n'roll first, we may well ask ourselves?

Lynott remained stage centre for most of the set, intimidating the audience with clenched fists.

Brian Robertson played his guitar with a cigarette stuck not between his lips but in his note-picking right hand . . . This boy has a true understanding of charisma. Or else he was wrecked again. Whatever, his guitar interweaved deliciously with Gorham's throughout the set.

The demands for an encore were really quite rapturous. Lynott became Johnny Cool yet again. "This is a song for all the ladies. Me and all the boys was wondering how the girls were getting home tonight."

There were a *lot* of groupies backstage. And Phil's bass was ripped off from the dressing-room.

SOMEWHERE AROUND about quarter to five the next morning I persuade a totally demented Brian Robertson that his bottle of Jack Daniels and his young lady friend are possibly better off in his own room, and that maybe it's a bad idea for his volatile Glaswegian temperament to be attempting to rationalise his place within Thin Lizzy at a time when his brain really does appear to be positively hurting.

He stumbles towards the elevator audibly contemplating whether the album's gone high enough for him to be able to sling a TV set out of the window. Then he shouts out that I can do it if I want and he'll pay for it.

Ah, Brian, I'm just an old stick in the mud, man.

Purely as a reflex action I switch on the radio. It's 4.58 in the morning. And "The Boys Are Back In Town" is coming out of the speakers.

Isn't this where we came in?